

Watch For The Green Crab — A New Clam Enemy

by

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The green crab is a serious clam enemy. In the last ten years it has worked its way up the coast of Maine and in 1951 it appeared in Canada. Now it occupies both the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick side of the Bay of Fundy and last year there was evidence from Wedgeport that it is rounding the southwestern tip of Nova Scotia and spreading eastward along the outer coast.

It is increasing rapidly in this area and young molluscan shellfish are its favourite food. Wherever it has appeared it has attacked clam stocks and in some cases practically wiped them out. We know little about its food habits or what would happen if it pushed its way into other clam areas or into oyster areas like the Bras d'Or Lakes and the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

While searching for some means of control the Fisheries Research Board is trying to keep up to date in knowing how far the animal has extended its range. We need all the information we can get about this new menace to our shellfish stocks.

Identification

The green crab usually measures two to three inches across the shell and on first sight it is often mistaken for one of the two species of rock crabs commonly seen along our shores and taken in lobster traps. The rock crabs ordinarily grow as large as five to six inches across the shell and their greater size alone may often distinguish them from green crabs.

As the name suggests green crabs are greenish in general appearance but many of them, especially older ones, are so mottled with black as to scarcely justify their name. Ordinarily rock crabs are brown or reddish-brown and can thereby be distinguished from green crabs.

The habits of green and rock crabs differ, too. Green crabs live from high-water mark down to a few fathoms below low-water mark on rocky, sandy or muddy shores. They are quick walkers, able swimmers and expert burrowers in sand. When the tide is low they stay on the beaches burying themselves in sand or hiding under weed or stones. If cornered they fight fiercely. By contrast rock crabs tend to spend their time below water and except when small are not common on beaches at low tide. They are clumsy walkers and cowardly.

The surest and best basis for identification is a tooth-count of the shell edge. Figure 1 shows that the green crab has five large, sharp, teeth like the teeth of a rip saw, on both sides, counting outward from the eye along the shell edge. In contrast the two species of rock crabs which resemble one another very closely, have nine or eleven such teeth, and many of them are small and rounded. Figure 2 shows this for one of the species of rock crabs.

Watch for green crabs and report discoveries

Because this invasion of green crabs is such a menace to our molluscan shellfish industries we urge everyone, especially those in southwestern Nova Scotia to keep a sharp look-out for them and report any discoveries. If you find them tell your Fisheries Officer and give him samples if you can. He will send them to us. If you prefer, write and send a sample directly to the Director, Atlantic Biological Station, St. Andrews, N. B.



Figure 1. Green Crab (*Carcinides maenas* L.) Five large, sharp, teeth on each side counting outward along the shell edge from the eyes.



Figure 2. Rock Crab (*Cancer irroratus* Say). Nine teeth on each side counting outward along the shell edge from the eyes.

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